ADVANCING ADVOCACY FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

OUTCOME REPORT FROM THE NOVEMBER 2019 ADVOCACY FOR SRHR RETREAT

Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights
FPI
OXFAM Canada
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CONTEXT

In November 2019, **Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights**, as part of the Future Planning Initiative[i] and with support from Global Affairs Canada, brought together a group of advocates in Ottawa, Canada. The advocates represented various organizations and coalitions that work to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) around the world. Participants shared and learned from one another on the topic of advocacy for SRHR.

Retreat objectives:

- Share best practices and strategies related to SRHR advocacy
- Participate in collective learning on monitoring and evaluating SRHR advocacy
- Explore challenges and opportunities related to funding
- Draft recommendations for global funders on how to best support feminist SRHR advocacy
- Deepen connections and explore collaboration between global SRHR advocacy organizations, Canadian civil society, and the Government of Canada

This outcome document provides an overview of these discussions, a summary of Outcome Harvesting (a monitoring and evaluation methodology that can be used to learn from and assess the impact of SRHR advocacy), and recommendations for global funders who would like to support advocacy for SRHR.

DISCUSSION OVERVIEW

Defining our Advocacy

What do we mean when we talk about advocacy? What is the "doing" of advocacy?

In our discussions, an important starting point was defining advocacy, particularly advocacy to advance SRHR. While all retreat participants consider themselves feminist advocates, they recognized that their work looked very different and was **largely shaped by political contexts and the environments in which they work. There is no one, specific recipe for SRHR advocacy**.

Advocacy for SRHR is often aimed at the state or government to enact law and policy change but for advocates working within countries with authoritarian governments, engaging with the state is not an option. Instead, advocacy might target opposition groups or private industry. When law and policy change is not an option, advocacy can also work to change social norms and foster supportive contexts for policy implementation.

To advance SRHR, we use a range of advocacy methods. These are strategies and activities such as, but not limited to: thought-leadership, building an evidence base, policy change, policy implementation, decriminalization, litigation, capacity-strengthening, movement building, storytelling and amplifying voices, and information, education, and communication (IEC) activities.

i The Future Planning Initiative is a coalition of Canadian organizations working together to advocate for Canadian leadership on SRHR. Member organizations include: Action Canada, the Canadian Partnership for Women's and Children's Health, Oxfam Canada, Global Canada, and the Canadian Council on International Cooperation.

Advocacy can take many forms, but all participants agreed: advocacy is a **feminist and decolonial tool to disrupt power, change discourse, and drive accountability**.

Participants identified **movement building** as critical to advocacy for SRHR. This includes convenings, dialogue, questioning/challenging social norms, cross-movement learning and collaboration, community-led mobilization, and making room for disagreement and dissent –recognizing where growth often happens. They also agreed that recognizing the interlinkages between movements and engaging in movement building are central to feminist, anti-racist, and intersectional advocacy. Other key principles include representation, ownership, a grassroots approach, and the recognition and disruption of power and structural inequities.

During the retreat, participants questioned the use of the term "advocacy." An English word commonly used in the Global North, ''advocacy" does not carry the same meaning or impact in other languages and contexts. Terms such as "activism", "lobbying", "influencing", or "defending human rights" can more accurately capture such work, depending on the strategies being used. Despite the difference in nomenclature, the act of **challenging power and holding those in power accountable**, resonated broadly.

Another prevalent theme when discussing SRHR advocacy was the role of advocates in **"holding the line" and countering opposition**. Across most countries and political contexts, feminist advocates are key actors in protecting SRHR gains and preventing backsliding. Holding the line can take various forms; it can include countering misinformation, strategizing and agenda setting within and between movements, and participatory actions. This work is essential to the protection and advancement of SRHR.

Finally, participants voiced the need for **advocacy to be defined by those doing the work**, not by donors or Northern-based organizations with their own ideas on advocacy. This is key not only to implement relevant and transformative advocacy, but also to challenge colonial, racist, and harmful power dynamics.

Being Accountable to Movements

Are funders accountable to movements? What happens when funders take on the role of advocates? What about accountability within movements?

With increased funder interest in supporting advocacy, funders' participation in advocacy spaces has increased. Due to the power dynamics at play, this can lead to funders taking on active or directive roles and stifling the voices of grassroots advocates. This can reinforce hierarchies and systems of oppression and shift focus away from movements.

Grantees themselves sometimes facilitate the overstepping of boundaries by granting funders access to advocacy spaces. Power plays a key role in this; organizations are often stuck in a scarcity mentality and hyper-focused on pursuing and maintaining funders. Funders are invited into these spaces to demonstrate "value for money", a concept reinforced by flawed funding models that demand concrete and quantifiable outputs.

Funders must recognize the power they hold. Rather than participating in advocacy spaces, funders should meet with other funders, in spaces where power is shared more equally. Furthermore, advocates should be invited to participate in funder spaces where they can see how funders operate and how decisions are made.

The funder/grantee "partner" relationship, which can serve to invisibilize power, should be reassessed. Using the term "partner" over "funder" does not change who holds the power in a funding relationship.

Another way for funders to foster accountability to movements and grantees is through **greater funder transparency** around priorities, values (does the funder value movements and accountability?), processes, and spending.

Funders should be aware of how their structures can inhibit and prevent movement building. By "silo"-ing issues in separate portfolios and defining specific priorities and outputs, **organizations face limitations in their ability to be creative, practice intersectionality, and foster partnerships**. Where monitoring and evaluation requirements demand strict outputs in specific thematic areas, the value of cross-movement work, such as making linkages between climate change activism and SRHR, is not easily measured.

Accountability within movements is also a key consideration. The increasingly common process of sub-granting and/or the use of intermediary organizations has led to shifts in the traditional funder/grantee relationship, with NGOs organizing coalitions and consortiums, submitting joint proposals, and managing relationships. While this model places value on partnerships and movement building, it can lead to increased competition for funding and additional financial support for larger – and often Global North-based - coordinating organizations. In these cases, accountability shifts away from funders, whereas power extends to the intermediary organization(s). While these funding models offer new ways to support local and grassroots advocates, they should not be viewed as the sole remedy in addressing flawed funding models or supporting movement building. Both funders and intermediaries should be accountable to the meaningful engagement of local and grassroots organizations.

Alternative Funding Models

At the November retreat, the **Association for Women's Rights in Development**, the **FRIDA Young Feminist Fund**, and the **Equality Fund** presented on feminist funding models and funding women's rights organizations. From mapping the funding landscape to how they are challenging and transforming it, these organizations shared the work they and their partners are doing to create more transparent and accountable funding mechanisms. Some of the articulated values of feminist funding included: trust, transparency, capacity-strengthening, flexibility, participation, accountability, equity, and consultation.

See the **resources** section for more information on feminist funding models.

LEARNING FROM AND REPORTING ON OUR ADVOCACY: OUTCOME HARVESTING

While advocates know that the work they do is important and effective, **traditional reporting structures often fail to capture the impact of advocacy**. Advocacy to advance SRHR, for example, can be difficult to measure or report on due to it being non-linear, unpredictable, carried out over long periods of time, and dependent on various external factors.

Most funders ask unrealistic, burdensome, and ineffective questions of their grantees. For example, when asked to count "beneficiaries" or provide other quantitative data, what is reported is often an informed guess. The resources and time needed for this evaluation is too great, with the resulting data not necessarily speaking to the advocacy carried out.

Consultant Barbara Klugman, an evaluation practitioner, joined us to share knowledge on monitoring and evaluating SRHR advocacy. Participants were introduced to **outcome harvesting**, a monitoring and evaluation methodology that can be used to uncover what is meaningful for funders and enable organizations to be accountable for money received, while also contributing to internal learning and growth.

Outcome harvesting recognizes the complexity of advocacy. Rather than asking advocates to predict future changes and achievements, they are asked to identify and verify changes (or "outcomes") that have already occurred. Advocates can then assess how they may or may not have contributed to the identified change. Outcome harvesting realistically looks at an organization's sphere of influence. Instead of trying to prove cause and effect, outcome harvesting looks at actual outcomes (intended or unintended) and assesses contributions as well as various other factors that may have impacted the final outcomes.

OUTCOME:

An observable, verifiable change in behaviours, relationships, actions, policies, or practices that can be seen in the individual, group, community, organization, or institution.

OUTPUT:

What the intervention did, evidence of a completed activity, the activity contributes to influencing people (outcomes)

Instead of asking the question of "how can we measure advocacy?", we used outcome harvesting to flip the question inwards, challenging the idea that reporting is something we only do for our funders. Outcome harvesting encourages advocates to embrace it as an **opportunity for internal learning and growth**.

Start with what changed and then determine what role you played

In this activity, participants were asked: "how do we know what we do works?" and were encouraged to reflect on actual outcomes. Prompts included:

- Who changed? (e.g. an individual or institution)
- What was the change?
- What is being done differently?
- Over what period? Where?
- What were you hoping would happen? What did happen?
- What were the outcomes? (something new, as opposed to an activity)

External factors that often influence SRHR advocacy can include political change, the introduction of new laws or policies, media, other groups or organizations, new influencers, decision-makers, and much more. Rather than trying to predict and then later explain how your organization single-handedly achieved a specific objective and advanced SRHR, outcome harvesting recommends **regular reflection on outcomes** (as often as every week) and assessment to determine how your work contributed to specific outcomes.

Outcome harvesting is highly participatory and engages different stakeholders, actors, and beneficiaries to verify outcomes and contributions. This process complements SRHR advocacy, where various stakeholders and external factors can all impact outcomes. Outcome harvesting can also be a feminist approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in that it **recognizes and values narratives and stories** to validate outcomes and contributions and places importance on **collaboration and movement building** in achieving outcomes.

Outcome harvesting captures complexity and prevents organizations from disingenuously taking full credit for specific outcomes. With so many unpredictable factors and a multitude of actors and movements contributing to change in various ways, it is not realistic for advancements in SRHR to be attributed to just one organization or activity.

At the November retreat, participants used the outcome harvesting methodology to identify and verify outcomes and brainstorm evidence of their contributions to these changes.

Outcome Harvesting in Six Steps

1. Design the outcome harvest – determine needs and purpose of the process and what questions need to be answered
2. Gather data and draft outcomes – review evidence and documentation to support outcomes and draft descriptions of the changes and contributions
3. Engage informants – work with advocates, organizations, and beneficiaries to gather more information on the outcomes
4. Substantiate outcomes with external sources – interview and speak with stakeholders, including external groups, to verify and increase accuracy of outcomes and contribution descriptions
5. Analyze and interpret – categorize the findings, collaboratively analyze and assess whether the harvest answers the questions identified in Step #1
6. Support use of findings – discuss outcomes and what has been learned, consider how/if this affects work or decision-making moving forward

EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS

What have we learned through our funding relationships? What can funders do to better support advocacy to advance SRHR?

FUNDING PROPOSALS

- Look to strong track records and sound financial management to justify support for organizations in place of overly rigorous proposal processes
- Ask the question "what is necessary?" versus "what is reasonable?". Are the proposal requirements commensurate to the funding itself? Are the criteria fair and reasonable?
- Develop systems to facilitate the funding of unregistered and informal groups doing SRHR advocacy. For their safety and/or due to the politicization of their work, and other reasons, many groups and organizations are unable to, or choose not to, legally register in their countries
- Invest in feminist learning (e.g. research, building an evidence base, strategy, cross-movement learning, feminist monitoring, evaluation, and learning)
- Respond to proposals in a timely manner

REPORTING

- Adopt fit-for-purpose, flexible, advocacy-specific reporting processes, and mechanisms, recognizing the unique nature of advocacy to advance SRHR
- Adopt trust-based accountability mechanisms with grantees, looking to grantee track records and prior work
- Recognize the difference between outputs and outcomes
- Solicit suggestions from grantees on alternate ways of documenting work and assessing the efficacy of advocacy
- Work with individual grantees to draft customized monitoring and evaluation questions that meet both parties' needs
- Use open-ended questions in reporting templates (e.g. How did it go? What did you learn?)
- Consider the use external evaluators (paid for by funder) to take reporting onus off grantee
- Put an end to extractive reporting practices, including donor missions/ tourism, requesting beneficiary photos, quotes, and personal stories from beneficiaries, etc.
- Ensure reporting templates are available in various languages and that grantees can submit responses in their native language, fully enabling them to write about their advocacy. It is also important for grant managers and/or regional focal points to speak the grantee's language.
- Reframe reporting as an opportunity for funders to learn from grantees (as opposed to an opportunity to prove value to funders)
- Encourage and fund strong documentation practices of grantee learning, and have this learning replace reporting that does not benefit grantees
- Ensure reporting processes and mechanisms create meaning and value to grantees
- Recognize and practice flexibility when it comes to security implications and safety concerns of grantees related to documentation (e.g. when asking for receipts)
- Use calls or meetings in place of reports, maximizing efficiency and putting fewer demands on staff time
- Consider using alternative M&E and reporting mechanisms, such as outcome harvesting

TRANSPARENCY

- Practice two-way transparency between funders and grantees around priorities, strategic goals, values, and politics
- Enable anonymous two-way evaluation of funder/grantee relationship
- Create spaces for funder/grantee knowledge exchange
- Practice transparency around funder engagement in systems that undercut the work of organizations working to advance SRHR (e.g. support and investment in extractive industries, militarism, etc.)
- Practice transparency in where funding is going and how funding decisions are being made
- Recognize the dual role of some organizations as both funders and grantees (e.g. women's funds, fiscal sponsors, etc.) and the complex power dynamics inherent in this

- Raise awareness around the non-profit industrial complex and professionalization of advocacy, and how it can reinforce harmful power structures and weaken movements
- Be critical of the superficial localization of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) (i.e. the displacement of truly local organizations by INGOs with greater capacity in funding and advocacy spaces) and how it can undermine local organizations and movements

FUNDER PARTICIPATION IN ADVOCACY SPACES

- Adopt principles and guidelines for funders participation in advocacy spaces (e.g. organizations should have space to self-organize, with funders joining at a later stage. Funders should invite grantees to inform them on strategy and update them on their work, in place of joining advocacy spaces)
- Foster greater funder awareness of their power and influence in advocacy spaces and take onus off grantees to communicate this and/or enforce boundaries
  - » INGOs should similarly recognize and acknowledge the power they hold within advocacy spaces and end directive or disruptive behaviour
- Address overrepresentation of funders and the private sector at conferences and convenings. Movements should push back and reclaim these spaces

EXPERTISE

- Hire advocates from the movements to help inform the funding of advocacy. This requires recognizing a range of experiences and relaxing formal education requirements in hiring
- Listen to movements on discourses around "engaging men and boys" – some INGOs and funders have a superficial understanding of feminist issues and engage in programming that can reinforce patriarchal practices and structural inequalities
- Listen and be receptive to suggestions and feedback from grantees
- Adopt participatory grant-making that engages the movement in funding decisions
- Listen to grantee learnings and expertise and be flexible to changes to logic models and project frameworks
- Funders should assume the responsibility of understanding the context in which advocates are working. By having a clear understanding of what is happening in the city/country/region, donors can better understand systemic change and how to support their grantees' needs

SUSTAINABILITY

- Acknowledge that change takes time – offer long-term and flexible funding that can be used to cover essential, indirect and core costs such as rent, salaries, and meeting costs
- Include additional funding to provide organizations with support for parental leaves and other staffing costs

- Recognize and support SRHR advocates as human rights defenders and invest in their safety and security
- Support and promote self-care, safety, and fair remuneration within grantee organizations
- Facilitate introductions to other funders and sources of support
- Allow flexible use of funds for organizations investing in income-generating activities
- Encourage and support the integration of advocacy components alongside service delivery projects
- Do not idealize specific groups or organizations – invest in movements, not just individual actors

BREAKING DOWN SILOS

- Fund and support spaces for movement building, cross-movement collaboration, and strategizing
- Build funder understanding around the interlinkages between issues, the critical role of cross-movement work, and the danger of separating out issues – adjust funding streams and reporting requirements accordingly
- Adopt an intersectional approach and broaden SRHR support to make grants and funding available to LBTQI+-led organizations

Questions funders should ask grantees

- How much money do you need to achieve your goals? What other resources or support do you need to make this project successful?
- What are the external changes that have impacted your organization or advocacy? Internal changes?
- Were there any unexpected changes during the granting period?
- What are the movements that you have worked or collaborated with?
- What advocacy tools/mechanisms/approaches have you used towards your advocacy goals?
- What resources do you need to monitor and evaluate your work?
- How many evaluation cycles would you like (annually, quarterly, etc.)?
- What is the best way to evaluate your work?
- How will this help with your internal learning?
- What are some of the assumptions you are making in your theory of change?
- Do you have any feedback for us about the reporting process or our communication with our grantees?
- What resources did you put into submitting this proposal/report?
- What has been the impact of this grant upon your staff and organization?

Questions to ask funders:

- When reviewing funding reports, what do you look at? (with suggestion to remove additional questions)
- What is your process for receiving, analyzing, and using reports?
- Will the reports and information be used in any other way (e.g. policy

RESOURCES

Building a transformative agenda for accountability in SRHR: lessons learned from SRHR and accountability literatures, Victoria Boydell et al

Effective Social Justice Advocacy: A Theory-of-Change Framework for Assessing Progress, Barbara Klugman

Equality Fund Overview; Strengthening Feminist Funding During COVID-19 and Beyond, Beth Woroniuk

Feedback Labs: Tools and Training

High Hopes & Expectations: Feminist Movement Recommendations to the Equality Fund, AWID

Keystone Accountability: Guides and Resources

No Royal Road: Finding and following the natural pathways in advocacy evaluation, Jim Coe and Rhonda Schlangen

No Straight Lines, FRIDA Young Feminist Fund

Outcome Harvesting, Better Evaluation

www.outcomeharvesting.net

Outcome Harvesting, Ricardo Wilson-Grau and Heather Britt

Philanthropy for the Women's Movement, Not Just 'Empowerment', Françoise Girard

Resourcing Strengthening of Feminist Movements in Asia and the Pacific: A Feminist Funding Manifesto, Women's Fund Asia

Roots of Change: A step-by-step advocacy guide for expanding access to safe abortion, Ipas

Toward a feminist funding ecosystem: A framework and practical guide, AWID

Towards a new ecology for the human rights movement, Human Rights Funder Network

Vibrant Yet Under-resourced: The State of Lesbian, Bisexual & Queer Movements, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice

What is Outcome Harvesting, Ricardo Wilson-Grau

What is Feminist about Outcome Harvesting?, Barbara Klugman

Action Canada
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